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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the critical problem of the increasing shortage of qualified African American teachers for the nation's schools. As there are increasing vacancies and opportunities for upward mobility in practically all teaching disciplines in every state, it is important to encourage African-American youth to consider teaching as a profession. A discussion is presented on ways to stem the current trend, as well as forecasts by major educational associations and think tanks that by the year 2000 U.S. public schools will be staffed by approximately 3 percent African-Americans. Some suggestions are made to prospective teachers and training institutions for improving the performance of African-Americans on the National Teachers Examination. The final section of the paper discusses ways to recruit, support, and provide more African-Americans for the field of teaching. (JD)

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"Wanted and Needed African-American Teachers"

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"Wanted and Needed African-American Teachers"

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Practically every African-American today from age four to one-hundred has been formally guided by the careful hands and minds of an African-American teacher. The settings for instruction have covered the geographical gamut and socio-economic classes from the one-room school house in Indianola, Mississippi, to the largest educational complexes on the east side of Detroit, Michigan, to the smoke-filled community of Birmingham, Alabama, to the gigantic school buildings of New York City. African-American teachers have and continue to represent sterling individuals who are concerned about the health of children in the broadest sense of the word. They have also instilled in children and youth that they can learn and compete.

The instruction, presence, expectations and impact of African-American teachers as positive role models have been felt and known throughout America and the world. These teachers have influenced youth to become leaders, citizens, and role models. Teachers, physicians, ministers, nurses, dentists, lawyers, business persons, social workers, skilled workers in the trades, government workers, common laborers, and domestics have been touched, guided, taught and evaluated by dedicated and visionary African-American teachers.

The influence of African-American teachers has also been felt at African-American colleges and universities. The late Dr. Benjamin Mays' article, "Black Colleges: Past, Present and Future," (1974), pointed out that "it is no accident that from the black colleges have come the vast majority of the black leaders in this country since the turn of the century and before..If the only schools available to blacks had been white and if all the teachers had

been white, I believe, the story would be a sad one."

Today, we face a devastating crisis as we approach the Twenty-first cenury, a crisis that according to federal, state and local educational authorities that will not abate. The crisis is the African-American teacher is in danger as a species. One of the most serious effects of this situation is that thousands and perhaps, millions of African-American children and youth will not experience the instruction, guidance, and counseling provided by African-Americans. If this situation becomes a reality, many African-Americans will grow up believing they cannot be teachers. They will not benefit from the one guiding force that has taught every imaginable academic discipline; instilled a positive belief in self; encouraged achievement in the midst of social, physical, economic, and mental adversities; and communicated sound lessons for life.

Historically, African-American teachers have taught the history of African-American with proficiency and expected that every child could and would learn and become an asset rather than a liability to society. These teachers, past and present, have been the strong thread that has held together the quilt of hope, aspiration, and actualization together for more than 200 years.

Teaching, one of the oldest professions, is reaching more professional status than in past years. This progress has been attributed in part to new standards and guidelines adopted by most states that require individuals to take and pass the National Teachers Examination (NTE). Many opponents of the NTE view the

examination as biased and serving as the major cause of the decrease in the number of beginning African-American teachers. At the same time, proponents herald the NTE as a blessing, believing that the NTE will ensure that all teachers demonstrate their proficiency in communication skills, general knowledge, and professional preparation. It is believed by some that teachers who take and pass the NTE will be more effective in a qualitative way in guiding and preparing children and youth to face and contribute to the 21st Century. The Second Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Poll (1989) of teachers' attitudes toward the public schools found that 60% of all teachers approved the idea that in addition to meeting college requirements for a teaching certificate, teachers should also be required to pass a state board examination to demonstrate their knowledge in the subjects they teach before being granted a license.

Outcries of discrimination are being heard from prospective teachers; professors in teacher education programs; members of local, state and feder teacher education organizations. Many of them regard the NTE as a measure, employed to eliminate teachers-particularly African-Americans, who may not score as well on this standardized test as other groups. These complaints, however, have not impeded the implementation of the NTE as a requirement for teacher licensing and in a number of cases, a requirement for consideration for admission to the professional phase of a teacher preparation program. Currently, the state of Mississippi requires each applicant to the teacher education program of all state institutions to pass the communication and general knowledge skills portion of the NTE before being admitted to take courses.

Some legislators, educational lobbyists, parents, administrators, and community leaders believe the NTE is the answer to the

dramatic drop in achievement of American youth and the conditions of public education as described in the U. S. Department of Education Study, A Nation at Risk. Support for testing is also voiced by various professional groups that have historically required some type of state or national standardized examination for licensing to practice in such professions as accounting, nursing, medicine, law, and allied health fields. Consequently, these organizations of professionals view the NTE as long overdue.

The purpose of this article is four-fold: (1) to encourage African-American youth to consider teaching as a profession as there are increasing vacancies and opportunities for upward mobility in practically all teaching disciplines in every state; (2) to provide ways to stem the current trend and forecasts by major educational associations and teaching "think tanks" that by year 2000, public schools of America will be staffed by approximately three (3) percent African-Americans; (3) to provide prospective teachers and training institutions with some suggestions to improve the performance of African-Americans on the NTE; and (4) present wys to recruit, support, and provide more African-Americans for the field of teaching.

Since the implementation of the NTE as a requirement for teacher education admission, many African-American students on college campuses throughout America have changed their major from education to other fields where demand, pay, and benefits are limited. This increase in enrollment in other areas has led to a dwindling pool of teacher education graduates. The change has often been made due to students failing the NTE.

This change has been evident in a review of three (3) historically African-American colleges by the writers (1989). A startling statistic and one that calls for immediate alarm and action, revealed that the number of graduates in the teacher education program dwindled over the past several years. The number of graduating seniors in education prior to the institution of the NTE requirement for admission to teacher education and/or graduation was three-hundred (300). After the institution of the NTE requirement, the total number of graduates was forty-eight.

In interviews conducted with college students throughout the south, the writers have found that test anxiety has led some to change their major field of study. After choosing, completing programs and entering the job market, graduates in fields of limited demand have found themselves working in what they describe as dead-end, assistant-typ, entry-level positions that pay less when compared to the starting salaries for teachers. "I-have-finished-four/five/six-years-of-college-and-I-don't-feel-I-have-accomplished-anything" attitudes prevail among some liberal arts graduates. One example of the frustration felt is shared by a young man who majored in psychology, switching from teacher education after the NTE requirement was adopted at the school where he attended. He reported that he sat for the NTE on three occasions and failed. Each time he was administered the examination, he felt emotionally less prepared than before. He entered the examination expecting to fail and it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. This young man is currently working as a short order cook in a waffle specialty diner in New Orleans, earning minimum wages. His frustration is further

exacerbated by his peer's comments who refer to him as "Teach." They constantly remind him that he is the best formally educated person and thw lowest paid one in the establishment.

Students should not be discouraged by taking the NTE or other standardized tests. The reality is the test is the major criterion for teacher education admission and teacher licensing. While it maybe unfair to some, we must encourage students and college personnel to be proactive, rather than spending an inordinate amount of time on reacting as the pool of African American teachers dwindles. This time wasted must be spent on identifying and providing resources to enable prospective teachers to meet the current requirements and assessments used now and others being planned by Educational Testing Service (ETS) for implementation in 1992. They must be further informed that racism and other forms of prejudice that prevent them from entering some professions will not be eliminated. They must be motivated to approach inequitjes and injustice with demonstrated skills to compete. The following suggestions are presented for the application process and practice exercises for the NTE:

1.0 Request an application and bulletin of information from the National Teacher Education Programs, Educational Testing Service, Box 6051, Princeton, New Jersey 08541.

2.0 Complete the application for the Core Battery. These tests cover the areas of communication skills, general knowledge, and professional knowledge. The fee for taking the examination $35.; $45.; and $50. respectively if taken on the same day.

3.0 Do not let the fee deter you from taking the examination. Budget for this expense. Refusing to take the test due to the cost only adds to what some refer to as the self-fulfilling prophecy. An I-don't-have-the-money-to-spend attitude will not make you feel any better when you have deferred the dream of becoming a teacher.

4.0 The Test of Communication Skills purports to measure listening, reading, and writing skills. The Test of General Knowledge includes questions in the areas of social science, mathematics, literature, fine arts, and science. (If a student does not pass these parts of the NTE, he or she can retake the examination.) Generally, the Core Battery is offered three (3) times a year: March, June, and October. Testing sites are conveniently located and are usually situated at local colleges and universities. The Bulletin of Information provided by ETS lists the many testing sites.

5.0 Purchase the official guide to the NTE, A Guide to the NTE Core Battery Tests. Allow yourself a minimum of six (6) weeks to review the guide. Practice the exercises presented which represent test items used in previous tests. Spend a minimum of four (4) hours a day on the practice items.

6.0 Practice your test taking skills. Consult with the Counseling and Testing Department at your institution and request that you be administered a standardized achievement test on the 12th grade level. This exercise will provide you a real experience in taking multiple-choice tests.

7.0 Practice listening to tapes of various voices, accents to prepare you to hear, comprehend, and quickly respond to questions asked on the listening section of the communication skills portion of the test.

8.0 Emphasize reading. Evidence shows that students who read, comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate reading materials are successful in passing the NTE.

Colleges, universities, and public schools must develop and implement creative and honest ways to recruit more African-American students for the teaching profession. The following points are offered as suggestions to include in a recruitment program:

1.0 Traditionally AFrican-American colleges and universities need to encourage all students to take the NTE core battery at the end of the sophomore year. It could be utilized as a sophomore exit examination. National studies conducted by ETS and colleges show that sophomore examinees tend to score higher than juniors and seniors. This data strongly suggest that students

who have recently completed a variety of english courses have a fund of knowledge that is easily recalled and applied on the NTE.

2.0 Actively recruit students for teacher education programs who have passed the NTE. Provide academic incentives, scholarships, research grants, opportunities to assist faculty in research, attendance at professional teacher conferences and other perks for professional growth.

3.0 Provide cooperative education programs for students where they can intern with local, state, and national educational agencies as a part of their training.

4.0 Encourage students, where possible, to declare a double major that incorporates teacher preparation that leads to teacher certification.

5.0 Enlist high achievers as measured by standardized tests and high school transcripts to tutor other college students in learning ceneters, computer centers, and academic departmeent facilities to identify and support students who have demonstrated teaching potential.

6.0 Establish a fund to pay for NTE testing cost for those students who are unable to pay. Some teacher education organizations, sororities, fraternities and service clubs are willing to defray the cost for one or more students.

7.0 Implement an "Each One Tech One" Program geared to professionals within communities throughout America "adopting" one or more students in elementary, junior high, and senior high school and provide guidance and counseling. This is quite important as youth develop a need for achievement when they are able to identify with representatives of their racial group who achieved success in various fields of endeavor.

8.0 Institute counseling programs throughout the grades and curriculum to decrease test anxiety by providing experiences in taking formal tests. Encourage success!

9.0 Encourage foundations and business to fund scholarships in teacher education for qualified students.

10.0 Enter into partnerships with local school systems to offer a Career Ladder Program similar to the objectives of the Education Professional Development Act of the 1970's. This type of program should target teacher assistants in the public schools. Colleges and school

districts can cooperate to provide college courses for teacher assistants who are released from their work assignments. An option could include offering evening classes and Saturday classes to this cadre of prospective teacehrs.

11.0 Institute a college-credit course in a practicum experience in a local school setting where freshmen students can observe, assist, tutor, and support children and youth in the classroom.

12.0 Develop visual materials on positive highlights of teaching which could be presented to junior high and high school age students: salaries, working conditions, and opportunities for further education and upward mobility.

13.0 Start the recruitment of African-American students at at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels to tutor students in areas of deficits. A growing body of research shows that peer tutoring is helpful and provides an opportunity for youth to enhance their feelings of self-esteem.

14.0 Emphasize establishing high expectations and a school climate that supports academic learning. Many African-American youth from "different" background than their teachers are often sorted, selected, and programmed for failure due to a growing belief among some teachers that these children of poverty do not have any strengths.

15.0 Enlist parents, teachers, community leaders, political players, ministers, businesspersons and others to pressure and lobby for extended support for early childhood education programs and support programs throughout the grades. Clearly, there are many successful programs that support learning, but these programs have not been properly funded.

America's public schools continue to be the powerful institution in shaping the overall development of individuals who walk through the classrooms. The welfare of millions of children is not considered in some schools. "More than 25 years after America first declared war on poverty, the nation's children are worse off than ever. At the same time, there have never been so many advocacy groups fighting on their behalf." (Reed, Sautter, 1990.)

Largely, the public schools of America are inhabited by children of poverty. These are children who have suffered due to the lack of proper medical care, housing, nutrition, early-learning

assistance and health care in the broadest sense of the word. According to Reed and Sauter (1990), the only common denominator for the children of poverty is that they are brought up under desperate conditions beyond their control -- and equal opportunity seems a cruel hoax. These childrens whose lives are damaged are most often faced with individuals teaching them who regard their life chances for success and good health as abysmally bleak.

Under the backdrop of poverty and increased hurdles to overcome to enter the "mainstream" of society, there is a national crisis today to increase the number of African-American teachers. Children of poverty, particularly must have more teachers who are aware, understan apply, analyze, synthesize and evaluate African-American History again the social, economic, physical, and emotional problems. Many classrooms, staffed by culturally diverse teachers, are quite often ill-prepared, unwilling, insensitive, or lack knowledge and experience to incorporate African-American History into the curriculum. They frequently establish low expectations; establish negative school climates for students; inculcate activities that support the self-fulfilling prophecy of failure; perpetuate the myths of a dysfunctiona family; and identify and program children and youth who will be foreve encumbered by poverty that is more severe than that of undeveloped countries of the world.

Unresolved, tens of thousands and perhaps millions of public school African-American students stand to miserably fail in the areas of knowing, appreciating, and using the diverse, sterling contributions of African-Americans in building this country and

the world. Those youth sho do not know their roots and the contributing factors are obviously condemned to face problems in the future in dealing with themselves, their offsprings, and future generations.

Dr. Kenneth B. Clark, in Dark Ghetto (1965), wrote about the clash of cultures in the classroom. These revelations of twenty-five (25) years ago speak poignantly to today's schools. "The clash of cultures in the classroom is essentially a class war, a socio-economic and racial warfare being waged on the battleground of our schools, with middle-class and middle-class aspiring teachers provided with a powerful arsenal of half truths, prejudices and rationalizations, arrayed against hopelessy out-classed workign-class youngsters. This is an uneven balance, particularly since, like most battles, it comes under the guise of righteousness." Today, this battleground is larger. The battleground includes those youngsters who are labelled under-class, regarded with disdain, misunderstood, miseducated and guided by those who call themselves the salvation. Honest support is not a part of this battle! The future for children is grimmer! U. S. Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos has estimated that, by the year 2,000, "as many as one-third of our young people will be disadvantaged and at risk."

America's schools need and must have more African-American teachers, counselors and administrators to invest and rescue children and youth from the throes of dire poverty. Marian Wright Edelman, Director of the Children's Defense Fund in Washington, D.C., stated "millions of poor children need child care, not foster care, a check-up, not an intensive-care bed;

a tutor, not a guardian; drug education, not detoxification; a scholarhip, not a detention . But it has been hard to get them what they need -- even when we know what to do and when it saves us money."

To address the problems of povery in the broadest sense of the word, the public schools need teachers who do not believe and practice educational atrophy. They need teachers who are committed to change the current miseducation of many African-American students who are selected, sorted and labeled and placed into boxes that use overt manifestations of poverty to make excuses for why youth cannot learned. Obviously, all children and youth need to learn and become a productive member of society, a society that has historically penalized those who are at rsik and most often filled with blighted hopes.

Public schools need African-American teachers as role models and conscious partners to reverse the significant decline in the number of African-American males enrolling in higher education over the last decade. They need teachers who can instill strength and fortitude to recognize options and seize opportunities to redirect their lives and not accept failure. The American Council on Education study, conducted by Reginald Wilson and Deborah J. Carter (1989), found that while actual college enrollment grew by more than a million students between 1976 and 1986, enrollment by African-American males fell by 34,000. This change in enrollment is believed by some to be attributed to the quality of high school counselors and teaching role models.

Mary Hatwood Futrell, former president of the National Education Association (1988) called for a recruitment campaign for minority

teachers. At one time, 18% of the teaching force was African-American. Currently, eight (8) percent of public school teachers is minority while the enrollment of minorities in public schools is thirty-four (34) percent. The survey conducted by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (1987) found that historically African-American colleges and universities enrolled more than thirty (30) percent of African-American undergraduates in teacher education.

While some African-American colleges and universities are scrambling to survive, the U. S. Department of Education found that less than twenty (20) percent of all black college students enrolled in black colleges in 1984-85, but graduated almost forty (40) percent of those in the nation.

The dwindling pool of prospective teachers could be attributed in part to the declining enrollment of African-American students. Since 1970, there have been more options for enrollment in traditionally white institutions and nontraditional fields. Potential graduates in teacher education programs at white institutions have frequently been alienated, discouraged, and abandoned, leading to dropping out of college and delayed completion of college. Dr. Walter Allen, director of the National Study of Black College Students and associate professor of African-American studies at the University of Michigan, began a study of 4,000 African-American undergraduate and graduate students and professionals on 16 college campuses -- eight predominantly African-American and eight predominantly white. He has concluded that African-Americans on white campuses "are exposed to more material wealth, i.e., better facilities and more extensive programs. But they

also feel more alienated from their white professors and peers and are sometimes the targets of racism." Dr. Allen also concluded that African-American colleges and universities are more committed to taking African-American students from where they are and moving them forward. They convince them that they are capable of competing.

We must be worried that too few African-Americans are going into teaching and even fewer earning advanced degrees. Historically, teaching was one of the few career options for African-Americans. Today, many choose fields of specialization that offer more money and prestige. Dr. Benjamin Franklin Payton, president of Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama, believes this trend is devastating to the future of the African-American community. The writers share this feeling as they live and breathe recruitment, recruitment and more recruitment of African-Americans.

Every African-American must be challenged to recognize the crisis in public education. Each graduate of a historically African-American college and university must accept the challenge to support their institutions. They must be dedicated to save these institutions through financial support and diligence to recruit more students for the teaching profession. They must be invigorated to advocate for children and youth in the community. Poor parents are frequently faced with significant obstances to become involved. Each African-American of influence must be an advocate for public education, getting involved in the instruction, administration, and funding of public education. Failure to do so will exacerbate the critical problems that face poor school districts that must meet state department of education standards for achievement as measured by functional

literacy tests, standardized testing such as the Stanford Achievement Test and competency examinations. Currently, there are numerous school districts, poor in resources, parent involvement, and community concern, across the nation that face an ultimate receivership status by the state department of education due to the poor performance on assessment instruments. Needless to say, this status will lead to greater poverty, more culturally diverse teachers, asphyxiated dreams of youth, social, economic, physical and emotional hardships for African-Americans.

Graduates of historically African-American institutions must be challenged to help the plight of poor children who face little or no opportunity to receive and enjoy the inalienable rights of life. The following suggestions are made to increase the advocacy of children and number of African-Americans entering the teaching profession:

1.0 Fund scholarships for students in teacher education.

2.0 Solicit representatives from historically African-American institutions of higher learning to speak to career day programs in elementary, junior high and high schools.

3.0 Establish incentive grants at the local community level to encourage teachers to develop and implement programs in reading, writing and mathematics.

4.0 Organize an educational enrichment and remediation program at each church in the community for members and their families.

5.0 Support bond issues for school construction, teacher raises and computer-based instruction.

6.0 Establish computer and instructional centers in recreational facilities to enhance learning.

7.0 Adopt a school and provide technical, financial, and moral support, educational and cultural activities.

8.0 Volunteer as a tutor, counselor, and role model for children of poverty.

9.0 Establish early-childhood intervention programs to provide "at risk" students a head start.

10.0 Become involved in curricular activities like they were a championship sports event.

11.0 Highlight the contributions of teachers in the print media.

12.0 Organize "guide right" programs for youth in the community.

13.0 Practice community activism at all levels of the operation of schools, from the classroom to the board room.

14.0 Develop test taking skills programs in the elementary school and throughout the grades.

15.0 Emphasize reading in the home equally for boys and girls.

16.0 Develop incentives for high achievers in teh community. Honor them!

17.0 Encourage peer tutoring at all levels of public education.

18.0 Support traditionally African-American colleges by enrolling offsprings in these institutions. These schools tend to be smaller and more intimate, allowing students to establish a support system with other African-American students, faculty members and adminstrators who care and serve as role models.

19.0 Support excellence in teaching in public schools by providing incentives and awards for teaching, counseling and administration.

20.0 Establish campaigns with the motto: "Not only do African-American colleges and universities recruit you, admit you, THEY GRADUATE YOU!"

We must support the health and welfore of all children in the broadest sense of the word. We can stem the tide of ignorance and failure among many African-Americans by viewing education as a priority. Schools without the appropriate number of African-American teachers, counselors, administrators, and policy makers send the negative and devastating message that African-American boys and girls cannot aspire to become teachers, counselors, school administrators, and policy makers in the educational arena. The Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (1986) reported "the race and background of their teachers tells them something about power and authority in contemporary America. These messages influence children's attitudes

toward school, their academic accomplishments and their views of their own and others; instrinsic worth." Youth cannot develop a dream and realize that dream through actions in an environment without stimuli. What we do today to change the current trend of fewer African-American teachers will affect the decreasing number of African-American teachers in the classrooms of America.

Education must be viewed as the ultimate priority. Dr. Richard Williams, author of They Stole It But You Must Return It, cites that "Educational experiences have not meant to many blacks what they should. The school has been used as a social and political football. We should stop allowing the state, the school board and the politicians to do this to our children. The main purpose of education is to prepare a child for life." African-Americans must take responsibility for making education a basis for preparing children for life. Dr. John Ogbu, Berkeley anthropologist, stated "Minorities cannot simply rely on public policies. They have to accept some responsibility if they want to succeed.

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